

## Press Release

Contact: Statewide Emergency Food and Anti-Hunger Network (SEFAN)  
Adele LaTourette, Director  
Office Phone: 201-569-1804 (ext. 23)/Cell phone: 201-741-7722  
E-mail: [alatourette@cfanj.org](mailto:alatourette@cfanj.org)

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### **Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens Urge Quick Passage of \$3 Million in Additional State Dollars for Food**

As the Governor announced a proposed increase of \$3 million in the State Food Purchase Program (SFPP) as part of his economic stimulus plan, emergency food providers across the state said it could not come fast enough. Rosemary Gilmartin, Executive Director of the Interfaith Food Pantry in Morristown New Jersey says, "Since September 15th I've spent \$14,000 on food. Last year, in the same time period, I spent \$3000. The amount of food coming through donations is so much lower and the cost to purchase food is so much higher and the demand is incredible. This past week alone we signed up 32 new households, half of which are people who have never applied for assistance, verses 8 in the same period last year. This is in addition to the 300 families we already serve each week. Almost half of these new families are people who have never applied for any assistance in their lives. They have lost jobs, had hours cut back or are just finding it impossible to keep up with rising utility bills, increase cost of food and high gas prices. We are desperate for more SFPP food, and so grateful the Governor has heard our appeal."

At the Community FoodBank in Hillside, the state's largest food bank, an analysis of monthly client totals from emergency food pantries served by the agency shows a 20% increase this year in the number of people seeking food assistance. Some agencies in especially hard-hit areas report a 30% spike in need. And at the Center for Food Action in New Jersey, which has eight emergency food sites in Bergen County and one in Passaic County, the number of senior citizens alone was up by 41% in the months of August and September.

Donations and food drives are far from keeping up with the overwhelming demand. "Food banks all over the state are staggering under the weight of rising need and declining resources," said Meara Nigro, a spokeswoman at the Community FoodBank of New Jersey. "We're hearing, too often lately, of proud people desperate enough to visit an emergency pantry for the first time only to be turned away because the pantry has run out of food. Without an increase in the State Food Purchase Program, we won't be able to make up the critical loss of nutritious food from all other sources."

Adele LaTourette, Convener of the New Jersey Anti-Hunger Coalition commented that; "The Governor has evidenced his commitment to hungry New

Jerseyans. It is up to the legislature to do the same. They must pass this increase. Hunger is an issue from which absolutely no legislative district is exempt. It is an urban issue, a suburban issue and a rural issue. It includes Newark and Bloomingdale, Camden and Wrightstown, Dumont and Franklin Township. And what the legislators need to know is that time is of the essence - this money is needed today, not tomorrow."